



Hard Times Hit Parade is a dance marathon that requires audience endurance

By Colin Thomas

Publish Date: February 25, 2011

By Kat Single-Dain and Dusty Flowerpot Cabaret. Directed by Kat Single-Dain. A Dusty Flowerpot Cabaret production. At the Russian Hall on Thursday, February 24. Continues until March 18

I just fell into a Vancouver subculture that I didn't know existed. It's fun in there. They made me stay too long, but I'll definitely go back.

For *Hard Times Hit Parade*, a loosely associative show about a dance marathon, set designer Brodie Kitchen and a ton of other folks from Dusty Flowerpot Cabaret have transformed the Russian Hall into a Depression-era dance hall. Audience members sit on wooden bleachers that have been built along three sides of the space, period-specific advertisements line the room, and, in this sweetly shabby building, you feel transported to another time.

The vibe is intoxicating. On opening night, lots of audience members dressed for the occasion in '30s clothing: guys in pinstriped trousers, women in vintage hats. As young parents passed babies from one set of arms to another, there was a freewheeling and inclusive sense of community. It reminded me of when I discovered the underground queer community of the Radical Faeries, and, I'm told, there's a whiff of Burning Man about the event.

One thing's for sure: it's sexy. When the young marathoners launch into director Kat Single-Dain's energetic, swing-inspired choreography, you can almost feel the sap starting to run in the trees. David Yates, who plays a dancer named Charlie, does a sensual solo with a hat rack, and he's as carnal as a cat throughout. Aaron Malkin and Single-Dain, who play a brother and sister, impress with their casual virtuosity. And cloche-hatted Nina Longshadow rides the live band's groove with gleeful precision.

Speaking of the band, Maria in the Shower knocks it out of the park. Just wait till you see Jack Garton standing on the side of an upright but tilted double bass, blowing his trumpet like Gabriel himself, or coming on-stage in drag to sing a sultry solo about being a stranger to himself. Sweet.

There's a truckload of successful innovation in this show. As the dancers tire, a nurse appears and shines a spotlight on them one at a time, creating huge silhouettes of their heads on a dropped curtain. Within these silhouettes, shadow plays take place. The darkness in the head of an exhausted young man cracks open—thanks to rear projection—to reveal a storybook blue sky filled with puffy white clouds. An orange bird flies by. On opening night, the cabaret acts included an excellent magician named Dr. T, and big fun is had with vintage and fake newsreel footage.

I'm told there was a lot of company input to this show, which probably partly explains its easy joy and richness. It might also explain why the evening is way, way too long. *Hard Times* runs nearly three hours, but in fairness to its supportive audience, it should lose at least an hour of that length. Because it's episodic and lacks narrative tension, Act 1 already overstays its welcome and, despite gorgeous moments, Act 2 becomes an endurance test. A marionette sequence falls flat. A passage featuring life-sized puppets looks cool but wanders. An extended piece of poetic prose delivered by a deranged bride includes only a handful of

successful lines.

Scissors would help this script, but they'd have to be wielded bloodlessly. You don't want to cut up friendships.

Source URL: <http://www.straight.com/article-376897/vancouver/hard-times-hit-parade-dance-marathon-requires-audience-endurance>